

## **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2001**

### **Second Prize: Tracy Ma, Redmond Junior High School**

Every day different people are reaching for their own mountaintops. When I was a little girl, my ultimate goal was to reach the cookie jar unnoticed. I would stare longingly at the countertop, where the cookie jar stood, whenever I happened to pass by it. The evening dusk would find me planning and pondering of a way to reach the counter before supper. All my preparation was rewarded one fateful day when I reached the cookie jar.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was also trying to reach a countertop. King's counter dwarfed mine by so much that it was a mountain; he was trying to reach the mountaintop of equality. A bite out of a fresh cookie would transform into a taste of freedom and fairness for African Americans in the United States. It mattered not if I could achieve my goal; the cookies were to be my dessert after dinner. However, if King's goal was not met, thousands would continue to suffer under the "segregated but equal" policy. Those who opposed segregation may not have voiced their opinions. Houses of daring Americans with talk of black-white equality were bombed by whites that were angered by their daring speech. The Klu Klux Klan was another danger to the free-speaking American. The "Klan" arose once again to frighten civil rights activists. Lynching was another horror that inflicted the hearts of many civil rights leaders (Levine, p. 18). Those who kept silent out of fear never started the task of mountain climbing.

Before one acted towards accomplishing a goal, the goal would seem close enough to smell and touch, yet still out of reach. The cookie jar was just out of reach and equality for African Americans in a Caucasian society was, too. Previous to King's time, equality was miles away; Martin Luther King Jr. worked to bring African Americans to a time when skin tone would be overlooked. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan was one of the first to realize skin color did not determine the person inside. Harlan once state, "Our Constitution is color-blind" (Levine, p. 15). Perhaps his voice was too thin to be heard all over the nation. It certainly was not strong enough to reach Birmingham, Alabama, where a book showing black and white rabbits playing together was considered an anathema (Levine, p. 13).

The fight for equality was similar to a game of cat and mouse. As soon as the "black" cat approached its meal, the "white" mouse would pull away. When the Supreme Court decided to abolish segregation in schools, Caucasians set up private schools. Voices of those who finally decided to express the injustice of the treatment to African Americans were stifled by threats of bombing. Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech at Washington D.C. was among the first strong footholds in the mountain of impartiality. King's oratory talent was one of his many abilities that he used to obtain his goal of equality for all.

Everyone has hardships in life; everyone has small hills leading to majestic mountains. All around the world, people are filled with hope and inspiration when they think about Dr. King's persistence. Numerous factors discourage a person from reaching the zenith

of their mountain. People must put aside anything that is hindering their success, and only concentrate on the task before them. The road to the top is rocky, and many people, both weak and strong, have stopped midway. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an extraordinary person who overcame all the obstacles blocking his path. Of course, there must have been times when King questioned his destination to be one of success or failure. He did not let these doubts control him. Whenever people start to feel a vibe of skepticism in the outcome of their mission, they think of Martin Luther King Jr. and how he worked tirelessly to reach his mountaintop. When a hiker first begins at a mountain's base, its sheer size overwhelms him or her, releasing visions of failure to enter the brain; but then he or she thinks of what Martin Luther King Jr. must have felt at the base of equality's mountain. The strength and confidence from King flows into hikers all over the world, preparing them for their rough journey to the summit.

As I grow older, my mountains take different forms. Reaching the cookie jar is no longer my purpose. I have greater mountains to climb; but whenever I step on a sharp stone, my thoughts will go to Martin Luther King Jr., and his determination to attain equality among the people in the United States. I am positive that I am not alone when I think of King's many accomplishments, his greatest being the arrival at the land of equality.